

THE
LITERARY HISTORY
OF THE LATE
SIR *WILLIAM JONES*,
IN A
DISCOURSE.

BY
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THE
LITERARY HISTORY,
&c., &c.

GENTLEMEN,

IF I had consulted my competency only, for the station which your choice has conferred upon me, I must without hesitation have declined the honour of being the President of this Society ; and although I most cheerfully accept your invitation, with every inclination to assist, as far as my abilities extend, in promoting the laudable views of your association, I must still retain the consciousness of those disqualifications, which you have been pleased to overlook.

It was lately our boast to possess a President, whose name, talents, and character, would have been honourable to any institution ; it is now our misfortune to lament, that Sir William Jones exists, but in the affections of his friends, and in the esteem, veneration, and regret of all.

I cannot, I flatter myself, offer a more grateful tribute to the Society, than by making his character the subject of my first address to you ; and if in the delineation of it, fondness or affection for the man should appear blended with

my reverence for his genius and abilities, in the sympathy of your feelings I shall find my apology.

To define with accuracy the variety, value, and extent of his literary attainments, requires more learning than I pretend to possess, and I am therefore to solicit your indulgence for an imperfect sketch, rather than expect your approbation for a complete description of the talents and knowledge of your late and lamented President.

I shall begin with mentioning his wonderful capacity for the acquisition of languages, which has never been excelled. In *Greek* and *Roman* literature, his early proficiency was the subject of admiration and applause; and knowledge, of whatever nature, once obtained by him, was ever afterwards progressive. The more elegant dialects of modern *Europe*, the *French*, the *Spanish*, and the *Italian*, he spoke and wrote with the greatest fluency and precision; and the *German* and *Portuguese* were familiar to him. At an early period of life his application to Oriental literature commenced; he studied the *Hebrew* with ease and success; and many of the most learned *Asiatics* have the candour to avow, that his knowledge of *Arabic* and *Persian* was as accurate and extensive as their own; he was also conversant in the *Turkish* idiom, and the *Chinese* had even attracted his notice, so far as to induce him to learn the radical characters of that language, with a view perhaps to further improvements. It was to be expected, after his arrival in *India*, that he would eagerly embrace the opportunity of making himself master of the *Sanskrit*; and the most enlightened professors of the doctrines of *BRAHMA*, confess with pride, delight, and surprise, that his knowledge of their

sacred dialect was most critically correct and profound. The *Pandits*, who were in the habit of attending him, when I saw them after his death, at a public *Durbar*, could neither suppress their tears for his loss, nor find terms to express their admiration at the wonderful progress he had made in their sciences.

Before the expiration of his twenty-second year, he had completed his commentaries on the Poetry of the *Asiatics*, although a considerable time afterwards elapsed before their publication; and this work, if no other monument of his labours existed, would at once furnish proofs of his consummate skill in the Oriental dialects, of his proficiency in those of *Rome* and *Greece*, of taste and erudition far beyond his years, and of talents and application without example.

But the judgement of Sir William Jones was too discerning to consider language in any other light than as the key of science, and he would have despised the reputation of a mere linguist. Knowledge and truth were the object of all his studies, and his ambition was to be useful to mankind; with these views, he extended his researches to all languages, nations, and times.

Such were the motives that induced him to propose to the Government of this country, what he justly denominated a work of national utility and importance, the compilation of a copious digest of *Hindu* and *Mahomedan Law*, from *Sanskrit* and *Arabic* originals, with an offer of his services to superintend the compilation, and with a promise to translate it. He had foreseen, previous to his departure from *Europe*, that without the aid of such a work, the wise and benevolent intentions of the legislature of *Great Britain*, in leaving, to a certain extent, the natives of these provinces in possession of their

own laws, could not be completely fulfilled ; and his experience, after a short residence in India, confirmed what his sagacity had anticipated, that without principles to refer to, in a language familiar to the judges of the courts, adjudications amongst the natives must too often be subject to an uncertain and erroneous exposition, or wilful misinterpretation of their laws.

To the superintendance of this work, which was immediately undertaken at his suggestion, he assiduously devoted those hours which he could spare from his professional duties. After tracing the plan of the digest, he prescribed its arrangement and mode of execution, and selected from the most learned *Hindus* and *Mahomedans* fit persons for the task of compiling it ; flattered by his attention, and encouraged by his applause, the *Pandits* prosecuted their labours with cheerful zeal, to a satisfactory conclusion. The *Molavees* have also nearly finished their portion of the work, but we must ever regret, that the promised translation, as well as the meditated preliminary dissertation, have been frustrated by that decree, which so often intercepts the performance of human purposes.

During the course of this compilation, and as auxiliary to it, he was led to study the works of *Menu*, reputed by the *Hindus* to be the oldest and holiest of legislators ; and finding them to comprise a system of religious and civil duties, and of law in all its branches, so comprehensive and minutely exact, that it might be considered as the Institutes of *Hindu* law, he presented a translation of them to the Government of *Bengal*. During the same period, deeming no labour excessive or superfluous that tended, in any respect, to promote the welfare or happiness of mankind, he gave the public

an *English* version of the *Arabic* text of the *SIRAJIYAH*, or *Mahomedan* Law of Inheritance, with a commentary. He had already published in *England*, a translation of a Tract on the same subject, by another *Mahomedan* Lawyer, containing, as his own words express, “a lively and elegant epitome of the law of Inheritance, according to *ZAID*.”

To these learned and important works, so far out of the road of amusement, nothing could have engaged his application, but that desire which he ever professed, of rendering his knowledge useful to his nation, and beneficial to the inhabitants of these provinces.

Without attending to the chronological order of their publication, I shall briefly recapitulate his other performances in *Astatic* Literature, as far as my knowledge and recollection of them extend.

The vanity and petulance of *ANQUETIL DU PERRON*, with his illiberal reflections on some of the learned members of the University of *Oxford*, extorted from him a letter, in the *French* language, which has been admired for accurate criticism, just satire, and elegant composition. A regard for the literary reputation of his country, induced him to translate, from a *Persian* original into *French*, the life of *NADIR SHAH*, that it might not be carried out of *England*, with a reflection, that no person had been found in the British dominions capable of translating it. The students of *Persian* literature must ever be grateful to him, for a grammar of that language, in which he has shown the possibility of combining taste and elegance, with the precision of a grammarian; and every admirer of *Arabic* poetry must acknowledge his obligations to him, for an *English* version of the

seven celebrated poems, so well known by the name of *Moallakat*, from the distinction to which their excellence had entitled them, of being suspended in the temple of *Mecca*: I should scarcely think it of importance to mention, that he did not disdain the office of Editor of a *Sanscrit* and *Persian* work, if it did not afford me an opportunity of adding, that the latter was published at his own expence, and was sold for the benefit of insolvent debtors. A similar application was made of the produce of the *SIRAJIYAH*.

Of his lighter productions, the elegant amusements of his leisure hours, comprehending hymns on the *Hindu* mythology, poems consisting chiefly of translations from the *Asiatic* languages, and the version of *SACONTALA*, an ancient *Indian* drama, it would be unbecoming to speak in a style of importance which he did not himself annex to them. They show the activity of a vigorous mind, its fertility, its genius, and its taste. Nor shall I particularly dwell on the discourses addressed to this Society, which we have all perused or heard, or on the other learned and interesting dissertations, which form so large and valuable a portion of the records of our Researches; let us lament, that the spirit which dedicated them is to us extinct, and that the voice to which we listened with improvement and rapture, will be heard by us no more.

But I cannot pass over a paper, which has fallen into my possession since his demise, in the hand writing of Sir William Jones himself, entitled *DESIDERATA*, as more explanatory than any thing I can say, of the comprehensive views of his enlightened mind. It contains, as a perusal of it will show, whatever is most curious, important, and attainable in the sciences and

histories of *India, Arabia, China, and Tartary*; subjects, which he had already most amply discussed in the disquisitions which he laid before the Society.

DESIDERATA.

INDIA.

1. The Ancient Geography of India, &c. from the Puranas.
2. A Botanical Description of Indian Plants, from the Coshas, &c.
3. A Grammar of the Sanscrit Language, from Panini, &c.
4. A Dictionary of the Sanscrit Language, from thirty-two original Vocabularies and Ni-ructi.
5. On the Ancient Music of the Indians.
6. On the Medical Substances of India, and the Indian Art of Medicine.
7. On the Philosophy of the Ancient Indians.
8. A Translation of the Veda.
9. On Ancient Indian Geometry, Astronomy, and Algebra.
10. A Translation of the Puranas.
11. A Translation of the Mahabbarat and Ramayan.
12. On the Indian Theatre, &c. &c. &c.
13. On the Indian Constellations, with their Mythology, from the Puranas.
14. The History of India before the Mahomedan conquest, from the Sanscrit-Cashmir Histories.

ARABIA.

15. The History of Arabia before Mahomed.
16. A Translation of the Hamasa.
17. A Translation of Hariri.
18. A Translation of the Facahatul Khulafa. Of the Cafiah.

PERSIA.

19. The History of Persia from authorities in Sanscrit, Arabic, Greek, Turkish, Persian, ancient, and modern. Firdausi's Khosrau nama.
20. The five Poems of Nizami, translated in prose. A Dictionary of pure Persian. Jehangire.

CHINA.

21. A Translation of the Shi-cing.
22. The Text of Can-fu-tsu verbally translated.

TARTARY.

23. A History of the Tartar Nations, chiefly of the Moguls and Othmans, from the Turkish and Persian.

We are not authorised to conclude, that he had himself formed a determination to complete the works which his genius and knowledge had thus sketched; the task seems to require a period, beyond the probable duration of any human life; but we, who had the happiness to

know Sir William Jones, who were witnesses of his indefatigable perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge, and of his ardour to accomplish whatever he deemed important; who saw the extent of his intellectual powers, his wonderful attainments in literature and science, and the facility with which all his compositions were made, cannot doubt, if it had pleased Providence to protract the date of his existence, that he would have ably executed much, of what he had so extensively planned.

I have hitherto, principally confined my discourse to the pursuits of our late President in Oriental literature, which from their extent, might appear to have occupied all his time; but they neither precluded his attention to professional studies, nor to science in general;—amongst his publications in *Europe*, in polite literature, exclusive of various compositions in prose and verse, I find a translation of the speeches of *Isæus*, with a learned comment; in law, an *Essay on the Law of Bailments*: upon the subject of this last work, I cannot deny myself the gratification of quoting the sentiments of a celebrated historian: “Sir William Jones “ has given an ingenious and rational essay on “ the law of Bailments. He is perhaps the “ only lawyer equally conversant with the year “ books of *Westminster*, the commentaries of “ *ULPIAN*, the Attic pleadings of *Isæus*, and “ the sentences of *Arabian* and *Persian Cadhis*. ”

His professional studies did not commence before his twenty-second year, and I have his own authority for asserting, that the first book of *English* jurisprudence which he ever studied, was *FORTESCUE*’s *Essay* in praise of the laws of *England*.

Of the ability and conscientious integrity,

with which he discharged the functions of a Magistrate, and the duties of a Judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature in this settlement, the public voice and public regret bear ample and merited testimony. The same penetration which marked his scientific researches, distinguished his legal investigations and decisions ; and he deemed no inquiries burthensome, which had for their object substantial justice under the rules of law.

His addresses to the jurors are not less distinguished for philanthropy, and liberality of sentiment, than for just expositions of the law, perspicuity, and elegance of diction ; and his oratory was as captivating as his arguments were convincing.

In an epilogue to his commentaries on *Asiatic* poetry, he bids farewell to polite literature, without relinquishing his affection for it ; and concludes with an intimation of his intention to study law, expressed in a wish, which we now know to have been prophetic.

Mihi sit, oro, non inutilis toga,
Nec indiserta lingua, nec turpis manus !

I have already enumerated attainments and works, which from their diversity and extent, seem far beyond the capacity of the most enlarged minds ; but the catalogue may yet be augmented. To a proficiency in the languages of *Greece*, *Rome*, and *Asia*, he added the knowledge of the philosophy of those countries, and of every thing curious and valuable that had been taught in them. The doctrines of the *Academy*, the *Lyceum*, or the *Portico*, were not more familiar to him than the tenets of the *Vedas*, the mysticism of the *Sufis*, or the religion of the ancient *Perians* ; and whilst with a kin-

dred genius he perused with rapture, the heroic, lyric, or moral compositions, of the most renowned poets of *Greece*, *Rome*, and *Asia*, he could turn with equal delight and knowledge, to the sublime speculations, or mathematical calculations of *BARROW* and *NEWTON*. With them also, he professed his conviction of the truth of the *Christian* religion, and he justly deemed it no inconsiderable advantage, that his researches had corroborated the multiplied evidence of revelation, by confirming the *Mosaic* account of the primitive world. We all recollect, and can refer to, the following sentiments in his eighth anniversary discourse:

“ Theological inquiries are no part of my
 “ present subject; but I cannot refrain from
 “ adding, that the collection of tracts, which
 “ we call from their excellence the *Scriptures*,
 “ contain, independently of a divine origin,
 “ more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty,
 “ purer morality, more important history, and
 “ finer strains both of poetry and eloquence than
 “ could be collected within the same compass
 “ from all other books, that were ever com-
 “ posed in any age, or in any idiom. The two
 “ parts, of which the *Scriptures* consist, are
 “ connected by a chain of compositions, which
 “ bear no resemblance in form or style to any
 “ that can be produced from the stores of *Gre-*
 “ *cian*, *Indian*, *Persian*, or even *Arabian* learn-
 “ ing; the antiquity of those compositions no
 “ man doubts, and the unstrained application
 “ of them to events long subsequent to their
 “ publication, is a solid ground of belief, that
 “ they were genuine predictions, and conse-
 “ quently inspired.”

There were in truth few sciences, in which he had not acquired considerable proficiency; in most, his knowledge was profound. The

theory of music was familiar to him ; nor had he neglected to make himself acquainted with the interesting discoveries lately made in chemistry ; and I have heard him assert, that his admiration of the structure of the human frame had induced him to attend for a season to a course of anatomical lectures delivered by his friend, the celebrated HUNTER.

His last and favourite pursuit was the study of *Botany*, which he originally began under the confinement of a severe and lingering disorder, which with most minds, would have proved a disqualification from any application. It constituted the principal amusement of his leisure hours. In the arrangements of LINNÆUS he discovered system, truth, and science, which never failed to captivate and engage his attention ; and from the proofs which he has exhibited of his progress in *Botany*, we may conclude that he would have extended the discoveries in that science. The last composition which he read in this Society, was a description of select *Indian* plants, and I hope his Executors will allow us to fulfil his intention of publishing it, as a number in our Researches.

It cannot be deemed useless or superfluous to inquire, by what arts or method he was enabled to attain to a degree of knowledge almost universal, and apparently beyond the powers of man, during a life little exceeding forty-seven years.

The faculties of his mind, by nature vigorous, were improved by constant exercise ; and his memory, by habitual practice, had acquired a capacity of retaining whatever had once been impressed upon it. To an unextinguished ardour for universal knowledge, he joined a perseverance in the pursuit of it, which subdued

all obstacles ; his studies began with the dawn, and during the intermissions of professional duties, were continued throughout the day ; reflection and meditation strengthened and confirmed what industry and investigation had accumulated. It was a fixed principle with him, from which he never voluntarily deviated, not to be deterred by any difficulties that were surmountable, from prosecuting to a successful termination, what he had once deliberately undertaken.

But what appears to me more particularly to have enabled him to employ his talents so much to his own and the public advantage, was the regular allotment of his time to particular occupations, and a scrupulous adherence to the distribution which he had fixed ; hence, all his studies were pursued without interruption or confusion : nor can I here omit remarking, what may probably have attracted your observation as well as mine, the candour and complacency with which he gave his attention to all persons, of whatsoever quality, talents, or education : he justly concluded, that curious or important information might be gained even from the illiterate ; and wherever it was to be obtained, he sought and seized it.

Of the private and social virtues of our lamented President, our hearts are the best records ; to you who knew him, it cannot be necessary for me to expatiate on the independance of his integrity, his humanity, probity, or benevolence, which every living creature participated ; on the affability of his conversation and manners, or his modest unassuming deportment : nor need I remark, that he was totally free from pedantry, as well as from arrogance and self-sufficiency, which sometimes accom-

pany and disgrace the greatest abilities; his presence was the delight of every society, which his conversation exhilarated and improved; and the public have not only to lament the loss of his talents and abilities, but that of his example.

To him, as the founder of our institution, and whilst he lived, its firmest support, our reverence is more particularly due; instructed, animated, and encouraged by him, genius was called forth into exertion, and modest merit was excited to distinguish itself. Anxious for the reputation of the Society, he was indefatigable in his own endeavours to promote it, whilst he cheerfully assisted those of others. In losing him, we have not only been deprived of our brightest ornament, but of a guide and patron, on whose instructions, judgment, and candour, we could implicitly rely.

But it will, I trust, be long, very long, before the remembrance of his virtues, his genius, and abilities, lose that influence over the members of this Society, which his living example had maintained; and if previous to his demise he had been asked, by what posthumous honours or attentions we could best show our respect for his memory? I may venture to assert he would have replied, " By exerting yourselves to support the credit of the Society;" applying to it, perhaps, the dying wish of father PAUL,— " *estō perpetua!* "

In this wish we must all concur, and with it, I close *this address to you*.

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